



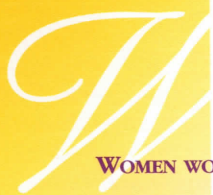
Working Women Count!

A REPORT TO THE NATION **Executive Summary**

WOMEN'S BUREAU



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR



WOMEN WORK FOR PAY—in greater numbers, in more occupations, and for more years of their lives than ever before. Today, women make up nearly half of our nation's workforce, and a staggering 99% of women in America will work for pay sometime during their lives. Nearly every woman has a stake in what happens in the workplace.

Despite the importance of women to today's economy, not enough is known about how women themselves evaluate their work lives. In May 1994, the Women's Bureau

launched ***Working Women Count!*** to ask working women about their jobs—what they like, what they do not like, and what they want to change.

We believed that if we spoke to women, they would talk back. And they did. In record numbers.

In only four months, over a quarter of a million women told us what it means to be a working woman in America today. This report reflects their concerns and experiences.

“Not the Run of the Mill Survey”

As part of the Clinton administration effort to “reinvent government,” ***Working Women Count!*** reached out on an unprecedented scale with a publicly distributed questionnaire asking women about their lives as workers.

“This is not the run of the mill survey,” promised First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton. “This is the experts themselves—working women—telling us what we need to do.”

The Women's Bureau enlisted more than 1,600 partners to help distribute the questionnaire. The partners include more than 300 businesses, 900 grassroots organizations, 75

unions, daily newspapers, national magazines and Federal agencies—in all 50 States, the Virgin Islands, Guam and Puerto Rico.

In addition to the popular questionnaire, the Women's Bureau conducted a telephone survey with a scientifically selected, national random sample. This scientific sample provided a benchmark for evaluating the replies of women who chose to be counted in response to the public outreach. **Unless otherwise noted, the figures used to discuss the results of the *Working Women Count!* questionnaire are drawn from the scientific sample.**

Findings: A Consensus for Change

Working Women Count! paints a complex portrait of American working women in the 1990's. The voices of working women in this report reveal their pride and satisfaction at being breadwinners for their families and a significant part of the American workforce. Fully 79% of respondents tell us that they either "love" or "like" their jobs overall.

Working Women Count! also reveals a powerful consensus among working women about what is wrong with their jobs, and what needs to be fixed—a consensus that crosses all occupations and incomes, all generations and races, and all regions of the country.

In addition, the priorities and concerns of the women in the scientific sample mirror those of the self-selected respondents to the public questionnaire. This convergence points to the depth of consensus among America's working women.

Working Women Count! respondents speak with one voice on the following issues:

★ **Pay and Benefits Should Provide**

Economic Security: Working women tell us they are breadwinners, and frequently the sole support of their households. Yet, they are not getting the pay and benefits commensurate with the work they do, the level of responsibility they hold, or the societal contribution they make.

Improving pay scales and health care insurance for all are the two top-ranking priorities for workplace change of respondents in both the scientific and popular samples.

★ **Workplace Culture Should Support and Respect Families:**

Working women tell us their families are very important to them. Yet, they feel that neither their employers nor public policy adequately recognize or support women's family responsibilities.

The number one issue women want to bring to the President's attention is the

difficulty of balancing work and family obligations. They report that problems with child care are deep and pervasive, affecting families across the economic spectrum.

★ **Opportunity Should Reflect the Value of Women's Work:**

Working women tell us they have valuable skills and on-the-job experience, but often do not get recognition and credit for what they can do—nor access to training to build their skills and increase their marketability.

On-the-job training, and giving employees more responsibility for how they do their jobs, are cited by more than half of respondents as priorities for change.

Underscoring this consensus, respondents repeatedly express distress and frustration: they are distressed that their work at home and on the job continues to be devalued, and they are frustrated with the visible and invisible signs of inequality.

Respondents are concerned about incidents of discrimination. However, the most frequently described inequities, those that seem to weigh most heavily, are systemic. Time and again, women describe a work world that still compensates women in almost every job and profession at a lesser rate than men, defines jobs done primarily by women as less valuable, and fails to acknowledge that women are mainstays in both the workplace and the home.

As a working mother from Louisiana writes, "My first priority is, and will always be, to care for my family. However, I take my job very seriously and I am entitled to receive the same compensation and consideration for what I do as does any male working in a comparable capacity in the nation."

Conclusions: Making Working Women Count!

Working Women Count! gives voice to the hopes and concerns of America's working women.

We heard a consensus for change across occupations and incomes, across races, ages and regions. Respondents told us: that child care is hard to find and difficult to afford; that pay and benefits, especially health care, are neither sufficient nor secure; that training is valued by the professionals who have it and sought by the blue collar women who need it; that discrimination is experienced by women of all races; and that workplace inequalities on the basis of gender are endemic and in need of remedy.

Many of the problems women shared with us are also issues for working men.

While some of the obstacles respondents wrote about stem from discrimination, others reflect the trend toward a workforce anxious about job insecurity, declining benefits, and stagnant wages. The stresses on working families affect all family members and, likewise, the remedies stand to benefit all.

The Clinton administration shares working women's concerns about these problems and is actively working toward solutions.

For example, the first piece of legislation signed by President Clinton was the Family and Medical Leave Act, enacted in 1993 after a ten-year congressional battle and two vetoes by the previous administration. It is an important step, and the first legislation in decades to recognize the need for policy that supports women's work and family responsibilities. In 1994, the President signed the Head Start Reauthorization bill, which provides for the expansion of this very successful child care program—expanding the number of eligible

children and creating some full-day, full-year slots to better serve working parents.

Most importantly, the administration is working to provide greater economic security for all Americans. Expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit gives a boost to low-income families with an unprecedented income supplement. Passage of the School to Work Opportunities Act provides young women and men with new opportunities for job training and education and demonstrates the importance of investing in our future workforce. Through tough and consistent enforcement of our labor laws, the Department of Labor has been sending a clear signal to employers that this administration is committed to promoting equal opportunity in the workplace and protecting all workers, regardless of gender, race, age or ability.

Solutions to the problems Working Women Count! respondents have identified must come from many quarters.

Positive change will require a cooperative effort, and the imaginations and talents of many individuals and organizations. More than 1,600 partners joined the Women's Bureau out of a shared concern and desire to understand what working women care about. Now each of us—government, business, unions, grassroots organizations, and the media—has an important role to play. And we can each begin by discussing these issues with our own co-workers, our own community organizations, and our own families. We must build the consensus documented in this report into a national consensus for change.

Our challenge? To build high performance workplaces that fully and fairly value women as equal partners in American life.

MATERIAL CONTAINED IN THIS PUBLICATION IS IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN AND MAY BE REPRODUCED, FULLY OR PARTIALLY, WITHOUT PERMISSION OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT. SOURCE CREDIT IS REQUESTED BUT NOT REQUIRED. PERMISSION IS REQUIRED ONLY TO REPRODUCE ANY COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL CONTAINED HEREIN.

THIS MATERIAL WILL BE MADE AVAILABLE TO SENSORIALLY IMPAIRED INDIVIDUALS UPON REQUEST. VOICE PHONE: 202-219-6652 TDD PHONE: 1-800-326-2577

America's working women have made their voices heard. In vast numbers and with extraordinary candor and insight, women from every region of the country have responded to this unprecedented questionnaire and told us about their lives. This report is the culmination.

The report weaves a fabric of opinion and experience that is as richly diverse as America's working women themselves. Yet these wide-ranging convictions are unified by a common thread: women—indeed, all working people—want the opportunity and the resources to lead full, productive lives. They want to be treated not as disposable parts, but as essential assets. And they want to work in an environment that treats them with dignity, respects the importance of their families, and invests in their skills.

Moving in this direction is essential. It's essential for reasons of fairness and equality, but it is equally an economic imperative. In today's economy, only one resource offers an enduring competitive edge: people. Everything else—machines, processes, raw materials—can be easily replicated. The only element that cannot be easily duplicated is workers—their skills, their creativity, their capacity to work together.

Investing in America's workers is the key to competitive success. Private companies, government, and labor unions must equip workers—whatever their gender or race—with a set of flexible skills that they can sharpen throughout their working lives. Working women appreciate the urgency of this task. On-the-job training was cited by more than half the women in this questionnaire as a priority for change.

The same is true for giving workers—especially women—authority on the job. This, too, is a matter of both equity and common sense. Workers who are treated fairly, who are respected, and who are given responsibility perform better and produce more. Our best companies have recognized the value of flattening their traditional hierarchies and pushing responsibility to the front-line workers who know the product and customers best.

Still, not every organization is committed to investing in workers' skills and reorganizing the workplace. Some have opted for another route. And that is why it is also essential to block the low road of unsafe conditions, job discrimination, and meager wages. Fair pay and adequate child care, the questionnaire results reveal, are critical to working women and therefore critical to the country. Providing safe, healthy, and family-friendly workplaces is a national priority.

As we continue to reshape workforce policy—together with employers, women's groups, and community and labor organizations—we will address the issues which working women themselves have so forcefully and eloquently raised.

This report—an historic attempt to collect the views of working women—arrives in a Capitol that has already begun to change. Much work remains to improve the lives of working women. But already hopeful signs of progress are emerging throughout the country.

The Clinton Administration began making progress almost immediately upon taking office. For example, the first bill President Clinton signed into law was the Family and Medical Leave Act, which gives workers—men and women—unpaid time off work to care for a new child or a sick relative. The importance of this achievement cannot be underestimated, coming as it did after a decade-long congressional battle and two vetoes by the previous President. This legislation is a landmark achievement, the first legislation in decades to honor women's work and put families first.

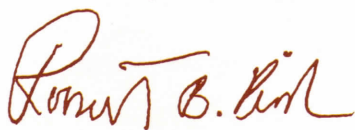
In addition, this year the President signed the Head Start Reauthorization bill, which expands this proven child care program. More children will now be able to participate, and there will be more full-day, full-year slots to better serve working parents.

The Administration is also forging solutions to working women's central concern: economic security. Thanks to the School-to-Work Opportunities Act, more of our nation's young people—both young women and men—will be able to move smoothly from the classroom to a job with a future. The Earned Income Tax Credit, part of the President's economic plan, is providing tax relief for fifteen million working families with modest incomes. And this Administration is vigorously enforcing the laws that promote equal opportunity and prohibit discrimination based on race, gender, age or disability.

We've made a good start. And the voices of America's working women add the fuel to power even greater progress.



TO OBTAIN A COPY OF THE FULL REPORT,
WORKING WOMEN COUNT! A REPORT TO THE NATION,
PLEASE SEND A SELF-ADDRESSED MAILING LABEL TO:
WOMEN'S BUREAU
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
ATTN: WWC! REPORT
200 CONSTITUTION AVE., NW
WASHINGTON, DC 20210



ROBERT B. REICH
SECRETARY OF LABOR



KAREN NUSSBAUM
DIRECTOR, WOMEN'S BUREAU